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"THE OLD TESTAMENT IN THE JEWISH CHURCH."

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The honest Bible student will always receive with gratitude any new views or theories concerning God's Word, providing they are better than the old ones which he already has. But old views will be displaced by the new only when the former are shown to be wrong, and the latter proved to be right. For a new theory to be accepted, it must be substantiated by true methods and sound argument, as well as be satisfactory in its conclusions. Those views, supported only by false methods of discussion, will, in all probability, themselves be incorrect.

In his Lectures on "The Old Testament in the Jewish Church," Prof. Wm. Robertson Smith has advanced a theory, respecting the history of Israel, and the origin of the Old Testament writings, which conflicts with views that have been generally received. His views, in the main, are that the different codes of the Pentateuch were enacted at different times, the Levitical part in the days of Ezra, when the Pentateuch was completed; that before that time God had given to Israel no laws commanding or regulating sacrifice; that up to the days of Ezra the religion of Israel was a natural religion. His principal reasons advanced for this theory are, that he finds great discrepancies between the actual practice of the Israelites and the teaching of the Prophets on the one hand, and the requirements of the Law on the other. He has presented views on many topics of very great importance. He has used arguments which should be well considered. It is not the purpose of this article to vindicate the "traditional views," nor to consider the conclusions at which Prof. S. arrives, but to notice some of the methods by which he has sought to substantiate his views, and the kind of harmony upon which his theory rests.

Among the characteristic methods of Prof. Smith's discussions may be mentioned the following: his subjective, *a priori* way of treating the subject; his arbitrary rejection of certain portions of the Old Testament writings; his unfair interpretation of those parts which he uses to support his views; and his explanation of the phenomena of Israel's history from the human side alone, to the exclusion of the divine. These methods may be abundantly illustrated. Our space will permit us to do little more than to point them out as existing.

Thus his *a priori* method of argument is seen running through the entire discussion. The simple facts are not allowed to furnish their own evidence. They are neither collected with care, nor estimated with candor. In the place of facts we have the Author's subjective ideas as to what must have been the case. Instead of starting with the facts and deducing just conclusions, he adopts his conclusions and interprets the facts accordingly. Thus, Prof. S. does not present his views at the beginning of his discussion. But a distinction must be made between his historical presentation of his views, and his methods of substantiating them. And it is very evident that his theory controls him throughout in the interpretation of Scripture. We have his ideas of the history of Israel and

the progress of revelation rather than the views that would be gained by a fair estimate and a just criticism of the facts as they lie in the Old Testament.

Thus he argues, Israel must have had certain forms of ritual as part of natural religion; they could have comprehended but slowly the spiritual truths of the Scriptures; they must have existed a long time as a nation, before they were prepared to receive the Law. So too; Moses could not have written, at such an early stage of Hebrew literature, in the style of the Book of Deuteronomy; he could not have given a complete code of laws at the beginning of the nation's career; it is improbable that laws adapted to Canaan were prepared in the wilderness. Again: The priesthood must have been like a modern guild,—and their ritual laws accumulated and orally transmitted; the system of sacrifices must have been completed late in Israel's history, and so on to the end. But there is neither satisfaction nor safety in such argument. At the end of every such statement it may be asked: "What is the proof?" All such subjective assertions may be met and neutralized by counter assertions of equal weight. To determine the truth we want fact, not assertion; proof, not opinion.

Again Prof. S. arbitrarily rejects certain portions of the Old Testament as having no authority in determining the questions at issue. Paragraphs, pages and even whole books are cut out and set aside at will. It is true that attempts are made to vindicate this process, yet the reasons given generally have little weight, frequently none, while in some cases a part is rejected confessedly to avoid a statement which conflicts with the views urged. The theory of Prof. S. can only be established by using but a part of the Old Testament writings, the rest must be got rid of. The evidence from the Pentateuch is rejected by assigning its composition to the age of Ezra, and this is done from subjective considerations. The Book of Joshua goes with the Pentateuch. The testimony of the Psalms is thrown out by assigning them to dates as late as possible. The Chronicles are rejected, though his reasons for doing so conflict with his own admissions, and the obvious facts. Prof. Smith further prepares the way for the rejection of any other part that he may wish, by giving an undue value to the Septuagint and substituting it for the Hebrew text, where it will help his theory, though he admits that the LXX text has been greatly corrupted.

Thus a word, verse or chapter is rejected because it is not in the LXX. Or, he assumes that the Hebrew text is corrupt, and rejects a part on that ground. Or else, there is always at hand the theory of many documents, according to which any passage can be assigned to any date. This theory of many "editors" never fails to remove any conflicting statement found in the text. Nothing can be more remarkable than the way in which some chapters of the Pentateuch are said to have been put together, unless it be the manner in which they can be taken apart by the "higher criticism."

As a result of this arbitrary method of cutting out and re-arranging we have a mere agglutination of facts, instead of an organic whole. Part has in some way been added to part until we have a mass of writings, which are a unity principally because they are found together. Instead of a living tree, blossoming with the promise of fruit, we have

a heap of flowers and buds cut from many stems, from which one may arrange a bouquet to suit himself. But the life is gone. The authors of the historical books have gathered facts and strung them together like beads without regard to their proper relations or real worth. Some of them are true, some of them traditions and some only the work of a vivid imagination. Of course when this is claimed to be the character of the Old Testament, it is easy to see that any part may be taken as authority and the rest be rejected. There is nothing to guide, but one's own will and the theory with which he starts.

The unfairness of Prof. Smith's methods is also seen in his manner of interpreting the passages he accepts as authority. Statements are isolated from their contexts and given a meaning the opposite of that intended by their author. Hebrew terms are defined by terms occurring in modern Arabic remotely allied to them. The customs of the Israelites must have been the same, it is said, as those of some modern eastern tribe, or indeed of some western nation. What a prophet is among the Orientals to-day, he was among the Orientals 3000 years ago. An Israelite priest was only what is signified by the Arabic term for priest. The Hebrew ideas of authorship must be determined by the modern practices in the East. Psalms and historical speeches must have been transmitted at first orally, the former because of modern customs, and the latter because of the absence of stenographers. These then as well as the oral prophecies may be interpreted with a large allowance for variations from the originals.

We find, as a natural result of this method of interpretation, that Prof. Smith's Lectures contain many statements mutually contradictory. So that, indeed, on some points it is difficult to decide what position he intends to maintain. His admissions in one place controvert his arguments in another. Since the truth is not interpreted as an organic, consistent whole, there is nothing to prevent these arbitrary, subjective interpretations of isolated parts from conflicting with each other.

Another characteristic method of Prof. Smith's discussion must be kept in mind in estimating the validity of his conclusions; viz., his obvious and avowed tendency to interpret the history of Israel and the writings of the Old Testament from their human side only. He says, the sacred writings are but the record of human *experiences*. There is no revelation from God except that which comes by *experience*. "The whole business of scholarly exegesis lies with this human side." The entire history of Israel is regarded as a merely natural growth. The religion of Israel was simply a natural religion, scarcely modified by any direct, positive, divine revelation. The law, apart from the Decalogue, was little more than the accumulated attempts of the Israelites themselves to establish a system of right living. It is true that Prof. S. says, that the Law was "a divine institution," but this can hardly have its ordinary meaning in view of this theory, respecting the development of the Law. For, especially, the ritual laws he asserts were not of divine appointment before the time of Ezra, and he further claims that the laws which were then codified were only those that the priests had already been practicing. The law thus becomes "God's practical will," only after the Israelites have worked it out for themselves,

and are ready to obey it. On this theory God does not go before Israel laying down laws which shall furnish channels in which the current of the religious life is to flow, and by which it will be controlled. But the current is allowed to cut its own channel, a few barriers only being placed in certain spots. Apart from the question as to the soundness of such a principle of interpretation, it will at once be seen that its practical results would be to determine our whole conception of God's redemptive work among men, and overthrow what seems to be the clear teachings of the Bible itself, concerning God's methods in bringing about his purposes.

These are some of the striking peculiarities which manifest themselves to the reader of Prof. Smith's Lectures. And because of these methods of argument, unsatisfactory, unscientific, and consequently untrue as they are, we would refuse to accept his conclusions, unless in themselves, and apart from such arguments as have been here alluded to, they can be shown to be true. Whether or not that is the case, would be a question for special investigation.

THE NEW CRITICISM.

A Series of Theses given by Dr. Franz Delitzsch to his English Exegetical Society.*

I.

The historical criticism, as it is practiced by Kuenen and others, starts from the dogmatic presupposition of the modern view of the world; this criticism denies miracle, denies prophecy, denies revelation; and, employing these words, it joins with them philosophical, not biblical conceptions; the results of this criticism are, in the main points, ready, before all investigation.

II.

On the contrary our criticism starts from an idea of God, from which the possibility of *miracle* follows, and confessing the resurrection of Christ, it confesses the reality of a central miracle, to which the miracles of redemption-history refer as the planets do to the sun. It confesses with respect to the harmony of Old Testament predictions and the New Testament fulfilment, the reality of *prophecy*. It confesses in consequence of the self-knowledge, and of the recognition of God, which Christianity affords, the reality of *revelation*.

III.

We reject *a priori* all results of criticism, which abolish the Old Testament premises of the religion of redemption.

Remark: The second and third chapters of Genesis are of greater weight than the entire Pentateuch. It may be that in this history of man's redemption and fall, and of God's preparation for the redemption of men through judgment and struggles, facts and dress are to be distinguished; but with the substantial reality of this history, the religion of redemption stands and falls. Also, the historical verity of the origin of mankind is one of the indispensable

*These Theses have been furnished us by Prof. J.L.Cheney, at the present time engaged in study at Leipzig, to whom they were given by Prof. Delitzsch. A second series on *The Truth of Pentateuchal History*, for which likewise we are indebted to Prof. Cheney, will be published in our next number.